

Relief Society leader stresses role of charity in women's lives

■ **President Jack:** BYU devotional provides unofficial kickoff for organization's 150th anniversary.

By Dallas Scholes
Deseret News staff writer

PROVO — Relief Society General President Elaine Jack of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints unofficially kicked off the Relief Society's Sesquicentennial celebration Tuesday during a Brigham Young University devotional address.

"I'm proud to belong to a group of women defined by charity — the Relief Society. Relief Society was founded to do good in the world, and we're intent on this goal. The lives of charitable women are so imbued with the pure love of our Savior that charity is the way we think and act every day of our lives," President Jack said.

The official celebration for the world's largest women's organization will start at 10 a.m. Saturday with an international satellite telecast from Temple Square in Salt Lake City.

"Relief Society is glorious because we join as sisters who come unto Christ. In all our roles as sisters, wives, mothers, daughters, friends, roommates, teachers, leaders and on and on, we strive to come to the Savior. I know how rich our Relief Society sisterhood can be because of what each of us brings to it," President Jack said. "Think about how unified we feel and yet how individual we are."

President Jack said the diversity of Relief Society is reflected in the founding mothers of the organization. Of the 20 founders, 11 were married, two were widows and six were unmarried. The final member's marital status is unknown.

"In Relief Society we have a motto: Charity Never Faileth. This is a motto of such spiritual force that I hope every woman in the church will make it her personal motto," she said.

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"Charity is love, not just earthly love or temporary love, but the pure love of Christ. Charity is so important that we must have it in our lives. It's not just nice to possess charity, it's essential," she said.

President Jack explained ways to develop charitable attributes — personal prayer, scripture study, freely giving, say "thank you" often and lighten up and chill out.

"Take a healthy helping of enjoyment and laughter from the smorgasbord of life's experiences. And give some to your neighbors and friends. While we don't choose all that lands on our plates, we may choose some of the trimmings. Laughter is a condiment that makes just about anything go down better," she said.

"Here's another good charitable habit, phone home. Especially call your mother. Parents need your nurturing and support, just as you need theirs," she said. "Even if your relationship isn't the best, call your mother and father."

LDS women gather to honor 150 years of Relief Society

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — In 1842, the women followers of Mormon Church founder Joseph Smith saw their men building a temple and decided to sew them new clothing.

From such modest beginnings in Nauvoo, Ill. — a brief haven for Smith's followers before the church settled in Utah — the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo grew into an international organization that lobbied for women's right to vote and helps victims of disaster.

This Saturday, Mormon women around the world will participate by satellite hookup in a meeting to mark the modern Relief Society's 150th anniversary. Up to 8,000 women are expected at church headquarters in Salt Lake City's Temple Square to celebrate the society's founding March 17, 1842.

"This will be the largest women's meeting that ever has been held," said Elaine L. Jack, the society's general president.

Today, the society is known for massive relief efforts in times of war and disaster as well as the humblest of service — baking casseroles for new parents and grieving families.

Under the charter, the society pursues three projects: a global literacy program for Mormon women, encouraging each chapter to write its own history, and working for local causes.

"Joseph Smith's words were re-

lieve the poor, and to save souls. The merging of the temporal and spiritual has been a continuity throughout," Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, co-author of a Relief Society history to be published in June, said in a recent interview.

The society's place within The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has not been without tension, however. The organization was formally abolished shortly after its founding because its first president, Emma Smith opposed polygamy, Beecher said.

It was re-established in the Salt Lake Valley in 1866.

Smith's successor, Brigham Young, set the women to working in stores and at home, and by the 1870s Mormon women were being trained as doctors and teachers.

They worked for suffrage and, representing Mormon women on the national scene, became charter members of the National Council of Women.

In contrast to the male church hierarchy, the women "networked," Beecher said. "It was lace instead of a ladder."

Today, Mormon women automatically become society members at age 18; between 1 and 2 million women worldwide are estimated to participate. There are 8 million church members worldwide.

Church authority continues to rest in the hands of the male hierarchy. But Jack said she believes the church considers men and women equal.

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■ **Celebration:** Service emphasizes sisterhood, unity among members worldwide.

By Susan Lyman-Whitney
Deseret News staff writer

In a service of celebration, broadcast by satellite across the world, women of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints observed the 150th anniversary of Relief Society on Saturday from the Tabernacle on Temple Square.

The church's first Relief Society was organized March 17, 1842, in Nauvoo, Ill. It was an outgrowth of an effort begun by Sarah Kimball when she invited 19 other women to her home to help sew shirts for the men who were building the Nauvoo Temple.

The sesquicentennial service emphasized sisterhood and unity among the 3 million women who are members of Relief Society internationally.

Relief Society General President Elaine L. Jack welcomed the Tabernacle audience and viewers in other countries saying, "Our challenges are as diverse as the countries we come from, yet

our commitment is the same."

She spoke of the early Saints who responded to the needs of their day through prayer and action — such as delivering babies and caring for the sick. President Jack and other speakers reminded modern listeners that this year's celebration calls for 18,000 Relief Society community service projects as well as a worldwide literacy drive.

"Women have such depth and such ability and such faith," said President Jack. Honoring what women are already achieving and honoring diversity were major themes of her speech as well as of the video presentations interspersed throughout the program.

In their native languages, a young Relief Society member named Ti-Chien Chen gave the invocation; a Polynesian Choir sang; and women from Mexico, Korea and Germany spoke of what faith and service mean to them.

President Thomas S. Monson, second counselor in the First Presidency, was the only man to address the group. He brought expressions of pride and good wishes from LDS Church President

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PHOTOGRAPHY/ PAUL BARKER

Relief Society President Elaine L. Jack says this year's celebration calls for 18,000 community service projects and a worldwide literacy drive.

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Ezra Taft Benson and talked about guidelines that were used in developing a curriculum for the women's organizations.

He said, in part, "Every woman has been endowed by God with distinctive characteristics, gifts and talents in order that she may fulfill a specific mission in the eternal plan."

In addition President Monson said, "The priesthood is for the benefit of all members of the Church. While women do not hold the priesthood, men have no greater claim than women upon the blessings that issue from it."

He issued four challenges to Relief Society members. "First," he said, "share your talents, for that which we willingly share, we keep."

Second, "sustain your husband, remembering that children often outgrow their need for affection, but husbands never do."

Third, strengthen your home. "In a Latter-day Saint home children are not simply tolerated, but welcomed; not commanded, but

encouraged; not driven, but guided; not neglected, but loved."

"And fourth," President Monson said, "serve your God." He quoted Emerson, saying, "Rings and jewels are not gifts, but apologies for gifts. The only true gift is a portion of thyself."

The first and second counselors of the Relief Society also addressed the audience. Second Counselor Aileen H. Clyde said the mission of Relief Society is to include all women. "Christ taught clearly that regardless of our life's condition, or our marital status, or our gender, we may know of his love," she said.

First Counselor Chieko N. Okazaki gave a talk titled, "Spit and Mud and Kigatsuku," which she began by saying, "Aloha," and was answered by a resounding "Aloha," from members of the Polynesian Choir, who were seated in the balcony.

The Japanese word "kigatsuku," Sister Okazaki explained, means "an inner spirit to act without being told what to do." She urged her audience to feel the power that comes from their own desires to do good.

"When I was just a little girl, my mother began teaching me to be kigatsuku," she said. "While she

swept the floor, she would say, 'Chieko, what would a kigatsuku girl do now?' Then I'd run get the dustpan and hold it for her."

President Jack told women she'd seen the courage in their lives. "You walk miles to church. You rebuild a home ruined by floods. You go to school, sometimes carrying your desk on your head. You stretch limited money so you can feed your family. You face death, survive drought, and forgive after a divorce.

"You repent when that's what is needed. You let go of old habits and espouse the gospel instead. You pay tithing when your children need shoes. You live through winter without warm clothes. You raise children alone. You accept a church calling when you have no idea how to do it. You work to feel good about yourself even as you feel so imperfect. You reach out to someone who may not extend a hand to you. You patch up a long-standing family argument. You put your family first, even when other options entice you.

"Cultivate courage," she said, "for it will help you live confidently and well."

Music was provided by a choir made up of female members of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir and the Mormon Youth Chorus.